

W I N T E R 2 0 1 0

Lifelong Significance

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The Story Comes Full Circle by Jackie Tharpe

It began in Munich, Germany in 1934. That is when Max and Louise gave birth to a baby girl they named Elizabeth. Two years later her brother Ernst was born and then Fritz the following year. They lived happily until Elizabeth turned four. In her fourth year, her mother became ill and died. Elizabeth still remembers sitting on her mother's hospital bed as she gave her the words of hope that sustains her to this day, "God will take care of you even though I have to go," followed by the command to take care of her brothers. Of course a four-year old could not fulfill that request. And after her mother died, her father disappeared, never to be heard from again.

Elizabeth and her two brothers were sent to a Christian home in Oberammergau (where the world-renown Passion play is put on every ten years). Catholic sisters ran the home. Elizabeth was only there one year when she had her first set of foster parents.

"I stayed with them for barely a year and then left because of sexual abuse. I was five years old. I ran away and went to the church to get help.

"I got a new set of foster parents in Oberdorf. The foster father was the mayor of the town. These new parents were very nice but 'mother' became ill with breast cancer and passed away. I was so distraught; they had to hold me back from throwing myself into the grave. I wanted to be with her and my birth mother because I thought they were in a place that might be better than here on earth.

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"I returned to an orphanage in Munich and was reunited with my two brothers. In the orphanage we were able to accept Jesus into our heart. The priests made it easy for us children to understand. I took my first communion when I was eight years old. Jesus came into my heart. I knew God loved me and would never leave me and would always take care of me. I knew beyond any doubt that He was always in my heart.

"When I was 10 a new foster parents came to the orphanage and picked me as their child. They were tailors and taught me their trade. I make a living as a tailor to this day. I stayed with them four years until my foster father decided I should be his mistress. I ran off and told my guardian what had happened. I went to another orphanage where I stayed until I was 18.

"At age 18, I was put out on my own and worked in a factory making blouses, pants and coats.



My brother Ernst would stay with me every weekend. We bought Kaiser Rolls and a pound of butter and that would be our food for the weekend. Then on Monday mornings, we separated again.

"I was almost 21 when I met my husband, an American soldier. His name was Kenneth Riddle. I did not know what real love was, but I've learned. We eventually married and had five children. I was 21 when I came to America in 1956. I didn't speak much English so my husband gave me magazines to read

and I also learned English from the TV. My father and mother-in-law, Mac and Nora Riddle, lived in Modesto. They were wonderful Christians and loved me as much as my own mother and the Catholic sisters had. They attended First Baptist Church in Ceres.

"Because my husband was in the service, we moved about a lot. Eventually, in Grand Forks, North Dakota, my husband asked me to join a Baptist church and be baptized. I was struggling with the decision because of my Catholic upbringing. But again, God was faithful to me. The night before we were to join, I had a dream and God told me it was okay because I was already walking in His footsteps.

"Just before my husband retired, we were sent to Las Vegas, Nevada where I continued working as a tailor. One day, in a jewelry store I saw a small ring with three hearts, which meant to me "Father, Son and Holy Spirit". So I bought the ring and it has not come off my finger since that day in 1972.

"After 13 years in Las Vegas, we returned to Modesto to care for my mother-in-law, who was very ill. We began worshipping at First Baptist Church. When I saw the three hearts all around the church, I knew this was where I belonged. They were just like the ones on my ring! As I grew in the Lord, I gave up romance stories for scripture and Bible teaching. It satisfies me so much more.

"I never saw my brothers again after I married and left Germany. I used to wonder about them. Then, after 38 years, I got a letter from my niece Renate that her father, my brother Fritz, was looking for me. He had four children and he always talked about his sister Elizabeth. But I was hard to find. After eight months of searching, Renate went to the consulate in Munich and begged to see where I went to in America. The consulate said he could not tell them. Renate turned on the tears and the man gave her a book that showed her an address in Winton. We had

helped my husband's brother Curtis buy a house there when we were stationed at Castle Air Force Base and he still lived in it. When Curtis called me in May of 1993 and told me he had a letter from Fritz, I started crying couldn't believe it.

"My husband and his brother bought tickets for me and our daughter Alice to go to Germany for one month. It was the most wonderful time of my life that God granted me. I was always afraid that my brothers were not alive. Now I can go visit them every two years.

"God promised he would take care of orphans and widows and He has. I have been an orphan and now I have been a widow for thirteen years. In all that has passed through my life, God has never left me alone. From that time so long ago sitting on my mother's hospital bed until now, God has always protected and provided for me. When I see the three hearts on my ring and the hearts all around the church campus, I am reminded of the Father's love in sending His only Son to forgive my sin and prepare a place for me in heaven and of the work of the Holy Spirit in my life to teach and guide me."



And so the story comes full circle. God's love for us and our love for Him and for others working together for His kingdom. Isn't that what it's all about?



Help bridge the generation gap in your church.



THE BRIDGE BUILDER

An old man, going a lone highway,
Came at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim-
That sullen stream had no fears for him;
But he turned, when he reached the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim near,
"You are wasting strength in building here.
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again must pass this way.
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build you the bridge at the eventide?"
The builder lifted his old gray head.
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him."

-WILL ALLEN DROMGOOLE



AGING WELL

Intergenerational ministry takes relationship building

Missy Buchanan

Provided by CN Building Adult Ministries Resource Center



Not long ago, I sat in a whale-watching boat in the blue waters of Washington State. Our captain told us about the pod of whales we were following. Known as the J pod, the family group was led by 60-year-old Ruffles and his 90-year-old mother. Trailing behind them were other members of the pod. Together they represented four, maybe five generations.

As the boat's engine went silent, we began to scan the water for dorsal fins and tail slaps. The captain explained how these whales formed lifelong bonds and helped care for one another. In many ways, it seemed to parallel the full family of God. I continued to think about the whales and about mixing ages in intergenerational ministry. I wondered what that kind of ministry is and what is it not.

I posed the question to the Rev. Tom Beagan, a United Methodist minister from the Detroit Conference who is the director of The Logos Ministry, which trains church leaders for effective family ministry. Mr. Beagan says that just because a church has mixed ages in worship or in fellowship does not mean intergenerational ministry is taking place.

If relationships among people of all ages are not being intentionally built and strengthened, he says, and if young and old are not serving side-by-side, it is not authentic intergenerational ministry.

Intergenerational ministry stands in contrast to much of our culture, Mr. Beagan adds. Think about it. Most schools and sports teams are divided into age brackets. Even churches segregate ministries by age. Children and youth have their own ministry staff and meeting spaces; adults have their own.

Though age separations are reasonable and necessary at times, they can easily become a

barrier to becoming the true body of Christ. How then do we break down those generational barriers that keep us from being a full family of God?

The Rev. Ann Willet, senior pastor of FUMC Royse City, Texas, talks about her vision of having worship led by people of all generations—and not just on special occasions. She encourages multi-aged, small-group Bible studies as one way to cross the generational divide. She also described the magic of seeing gray heads worshipping next to their young faith partners as a vital part of the confirmation experience.

The Rev. Jennifer Scott, pastor of children's ministries of FUMC Coppell, Texas, recognized the potential of intergenerational ministry when she first paired older adults with younger folks as prayer partners. As mixed generations regularly met together to pray in the chapel, bonds were formed between the age groups. She has also organized her church's first Intergenerational Mission Retreat.

Both pastors agree that building relationships between young and old is more important now than ever before, because many children and youth have limited interaction with older relatives who live far away. Unless the church is deliberate in its intergenerational ministry efforts, there may be little opportunity for younger folks to bond with older adults.

True intergenerational ministry requires churches to rethink the way they are doing current ministries, says Mr. Beagan. Instead of youth-only mission trips, consider church-wide mission trips that are planned by the youth, but open to all.

Instead of nursing home ministries carried out by active retirees, ask children's choirs to participate alongside their older counterparts in providing monthly worship services. Youth might use their computer skills to teach older adults how to e-mail and explore the Internet.

There is tremendous strength in intergenerational ministry. Not as another program, but as a way of being the church at its best.

Start small, if you must, to build relationships among the generations. Encourage young and old to serve alongside each other. Whatever you do, don't wait. Just start!

OPTIONAL PAGE

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